

But in the gathering that I attended the next day on campus, I saw a remarkable transformation. I saw a community touched by the deaths of 32 people—students and professors all—turned into a friendship community unlike anywhere else. And then the world began sharing its hopes that the Almighty would transmit healing to each and every person touched in some way by the heartbreak that had befallen Virginia Tech.

One cannot help but reach out to our fellow man at times such as those like April 16, 2007. The magnitude with which the globe embraced Virginia Tech in its ultimate time of need still amazes me. It does so because I see that embrace as visible evidence of the university's motto at work—"Ut Prosim"—"That I may serve." And we have seen that service in ways, shapes, and forms we could never have imagined being necessary on the Virginia Tech campus.

On that day and on each day since, we are reminded of the marvelous impact that comes from simply lending a hand. There are the first responders—the police officers and other emergency service officials who put their lives in harm's way in order to save the lives of those who did not fall, and bring an end to the chaos. There are the school officials—tested as if in a war zone, yet called back each day hence to preserve the integrity of a storied institution of higher learning. There are the thousands who gathered spontaneously on the Drillfield the evening of the shootings—one large force whose aim was to bring light to the deep darkness of the day just finished. There's the Hokie Spirit Memorial Fund—formed to serve as the clearinghouse for contributions, small and large, that began pouring in to help offset the untold costs associated with what beset the families of those who died and the university itself. There are the orange and maroon ribbons worn on our clothes, the visits by performers like Dave Matthews and athletic teams like the New York Yankees.

And so it has continued through the year since, almost unabated. The outpouring of support remains active. And so be it, for we should never forget the 32 lives taken. It is for them that we continue to grieve with and pray for their families and friends, that God may bring them comfort through the memories of the wonderful things their loved ones accomplished. It is for them that we are drawn to the memorial on the Drillfield, a part of the campus that will permanently serve as a destination for reflection. We remain steadfast in offering a kind ear to anyone who is touched in any way by the April 16, 2007 shootings at Virginia Tech and still requires reassurance. And we thank each person participating in today's remembrance events on campus, showing through their time and talents that they stand ready to help put the events behind us while maintaining recollections of lives lost.

We were all Hokies United a year ago. A year later, Virginia Tech has prevailed. It remains Virginia Tech. Today, let us pray to God for the men and women who passed into his embrace on April 16, 2007. Let us never forget the sacrifices, far and wide, made in service to the Virginia Tech community. And let us hope for healing, for it is through that healing that we can shape the lives of those yet to come who yearn to be able to proudly share in saying, "We are Virginia Tech."

A PROCLAMATION HONORING
COACH LINDA HOBART FOR
COACHING THE TUSCARAWAS
COUNTY ROCKETS SPECIAL
OLYMPICS BASKETBALL TEAM
TO WINNING THE OHIO DIVISION
IV STATE BASKETBALL CHAMPIONSHIP

HON. ZACHARY T. SPACE

OF OHIO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, April 16, 2008

Mr. SPACE. Madam Speaker:

Whereas, Coach Linda Hobart showed hard work and dedication to the sport of basketball; and

Whereas, Linda Hobart was a leader and mentor for the Tuscarawas County Rockets Special Olympics Basketball Team; and

Whereas, Coach Hobart has been a role model for sportsmanship on and off of the court; now, therefore, be it

Resolved, that along with her friends, family, and the residents of the 18th Congressional District, I congratulate Coach Linda Hobart for leading the Tuscarawas County Rockets Special Olympics Basketball Team to winning the Ohio Division IV State Basketball Championship. We recognize the tremendous hard work and leadership he has demonstrated during the 2007–2008 Basketball season.

ONE YEAR ANNIVERSARY OF THE VIRGINIA TECH SHOOTINGS

HON. JAMES P. MORAN

OF VIRGINIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, April 16, 2008

Mr. MORAN of Virginia. Madam Speaker, 1 year ago today, 32 students and faculty at Virginia Tech lost their lives when a deranged gunman, Seung-Hui Cho, opened fire on campus, indiscriminately killing and maiming everyone in his path. One of the most deadly school shootings in American history, the tragedy stunned the Nation and shook the school to its core. I cannot imagine how the parents and families of the victims dealt with the heart-breaking news that their loved ones, who they thought were in a safe learning environment, had become the victims of gun violence. On this one year anniversary, my thoughts and prayers go out to the victims, their families, and the entire Virginia Tech community as they continue to cope with the aftermath of that tragic day.

But it is also important to honor the courage displayed by the entire Virginia Tech community during the days and weeks following the shooting. Students, faculty, parents, alumni, and Blacksburg residents all came together to help each other cope with the physical and psychological damage of the shooting. The resolve demonstrated by the Hokie community was one of the most poignant acts of solidarity that I have ever witnessed.

Shortly after the tragedy, many of those affected chose to participate in initiatives to fix the laws that facilitated the perpetration of this crime. First among them was the deficient manner in which mental health records were added to the national background check system. Given his mental health history, had

Seung-Hui Cho's information been handled properly he would have been prevented from purchasing the weapons used in the shooting. Responding to pressure from these citizen advocates, Congress passed the NICS Improvements Act, a law providing funding to States to insure that mental health records are added efficiently to the national background check system.

This week, I had the pleasure of meeting yesterday with a survivor of the Virginia Tech massacre. Her name is Lily Habtu. Lily was shot in the jaw and arm during the violent melee. She described how the events of that day have forever changed her life. That trauma could have left Lily a shell of her former self, afraid to face a world that no longer made sense. Instead, Lily has become an activist, joining the Alexandria, VA-based organization called ProtestEasyGuns.com to stand up against the gun lobby so that others might never experience the pain she was forced to bear one year ago today. Right now, she is participating in a demonstration outside the Supreme Court, calling for commonsense legislation to close loopholes that make the purchase and possession of illegal firearms and the violence they perpetrate prevalent in our society.

I am given strength by people like Lily. Rather than retreat from the world, they have channeled their experiences into a positive, fighting to prevent future acts of violence. But the sad fact is that not enough elected officials are willing to take a strong stand on gun safety issues.

The problem is not confusion over what laws need to be implemented. Requiring universal background checks, closing the gun show loophole, preventing terror suspects from purchasing firearms, tightening laws against straw purchases, and banning weapons like the .50 caliber sniper rifle and the rapid-fire assault rifle are all positive steps that would reduce violent crime yet do not restrict the lawful ownership of firearms. The lack of action on these measures is not due to uncertainty over policy, but rather a lack of political courage.

We will never forget the lives cut short on April 16, 2007, and the families and friends of the victims who continue to suffer today. But our sympathy for these victims is hollow unless it is matched with a determination to prevent gun violence. It is imperative Congress honor the memory of the Virginia Tech victims. As a body, we need to stand up before another tragedy occurs, by passing strong, responsible gun safety regulations.

FEDERAL LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS CONGRESSIONAL BADGE OF BRAVERY ACT OF 2008

SPEECH OF

HON. BENNIE G. THOMPSON

OF MISSISSIPPI

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, April 15, 2008

Mr. THOMPSON of Mississippi. Madam Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 4056 which provides Congress the ability to recognize and honor the dedicated men and women in Federal law enforcement who risk their lives and welfare daily while performing necessary and often hazardous duties.

There are thousands of Federal Law Enforcement Officers, FLEOs, including those that bravely serve in the Department of Homeland Security. Of these thousands, some are injured in the course of duty. I want to take this opportunity to express my appreciation to these individuals, especially given the difficult task they have of enforcing our laws and protecting our way of life.

In the Department of Homeland Security alone, countless FLEOs serve to protect the Nation from harm at our borders and ports of entry as well as our financial, cyber and transportation systems. On a daily basis, these individuals work diligently, often apprehending or detaining people suspected of criminal offenses, even if it means putting themselves in harm's way. Their work is absolutely necessary to the security and well-being of our country and it should be properly acknowledged.

While measures exist to award military personnel and State and local officers for their sacrifices, currently only 2 out of the more than 70 Federal agencies recognize their own valiant FLEOs. Therefore, it is imperative that Congress address and highlight the value of these distinguished men and women by establishing a Congressional Badge of Bravery. I urge all my colleagues to support this important legislation.

HONORING AND REMEMBERING THE VIRGINIA TECH COMMUNITY

HON. ROBERT J. WITTMAN

OF VIRGINIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, April 16, 2008

Mr. WITTMAN. Madam Speaker, today we remember and honor the students and faculty who lost their lives a year ago at Virginia Tech. The entire community has made a valiant effort to move forward while still honoring those who were lost and injured on that fateful day. As a proud alumnus of Virginia Tech this day has very personal meaning to my family and me. My thoughts and prayers are with the families of the victims and the entire Hokie family today.

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THE DAILY 45: CHAVEZ CLARKE

HON. BOBBY L. RUSH

OF ILLINOIS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, April 16, 2008

Mr. RUSH. Madam Speaker, everyday, 45 people, on average, are fatally shot in the United States. Sadly enough, one of the victims on March 29 was eighteen-year-old Chavez Clarke. This Chicago student was gunned down after Saturday classes at Simeon Career Academy, where Clarke was attending in hopes of graduating this summer.

One teenage gunman brought a gun to school because he knew security would be light, police said. Clarke's classmates were outraged. On April 1—instead of playing April Fool's Day pranks—three hundred anti-violence activists and Chicago Public Schools students joined local leaders in their fight for gun control.

If we, as adults, parents, and legislators don't hear the cries of our children, then, WE are the fools. Americans of conscience must come together to stop the senseless death of "The Daily 45." When will Americans say "enough is enough, stop the killing!"

VIRGINIA TECH ONE-YEAR ANNIVERSARY

HON. CAROLYN MCCARTHY

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, April 16, 2008

Mrs. MCCARTHY of New York. Madam Speaker, I rise today to recognize the 1-year anniversary of the tragic shooting at Virginia Tech University.

Madam Speaker, today, April 16, 2008, marks one of the darkest days in our Nation's history. A year ago today, 32 innocent lives were mercilessly cut short in their prime. A year ago today, families and friends lost their loved ones in a crime of unspeakable horror. A year ago today, we, the American people once again lost a piece of ourselves and our sense of security.

These poor people. Their poor families. These were real people that were killed. They were our sons and daughters. This was our American family that was impacted on April 16, 2007.

The shooting at Virginia Tech was the deadliest school shooting ever seen on our soil.

Far too many times we have stood here in this Chamber commemorating days like today. Days when we reflect on what evil can come to bear on good people and we make grand proclamations about how we will do everything we can to make sure that it will never happen again. Never again.

And here we are—again.

The cynics among us will no doubt throw their hands up in the air and claim that this is just the way things are. What can we do?

Can we ever stop these nightmares from happening in the first place, so we don't have to hear about another life needlessly lost? The answer is most likely an unsettling no.

The fact is that someday, somewhere, despite all of our best efforts, we will probably come together again sometime down the line and we will deliver similar speeches and we will once again feel the helpless confusion that we have become so uneasily and reluctantly accustomed to.

No, we can't say that there will never be another shooting of major proportions like the one at Virginia Tech, but we can say that we will do everything in our power to close any loophole we can find that would make it easier for another individual to commit such a heinous crime.

We have made strides in the right direction. In January, this Congress passed and the President signed into law the National Instant Criminal Background Check System Improvement Amendments Act.

This bill was a step in the right direction toward keeping guns out of the hands of the people who stand to do the most harm with them. In fact, based on his diagnosed mental illness, it is possible that the killer, Mr. Cho, might not have been able to acquire the weapons he used on his murderous rampage.

We can and will save lives as a result of the mechanisms put in place through the passage of this legislation. But in order for the Improvements to NICS to be truly effective, we must make sure that this Congress steps up to the plate and appropriately funds the legislation that we all supported. This measure is too important to play politics with, and I call on my colleagues to stand with me and do the right thing by fully funding the NICS Improvement Amendments Act.

But beyond keeping guns out of the wrong hands, we need to make sure that systems are in place that will keep our Nation's college campuses safe.

Last week I stood with the families of Virginia Tech victims and announced the introduction of the "Virginia Tech Victims Campus Emergency Response Policy and Notification Act," H.R. 5735, also known as the VTV Act.

The bill amends the Jean Clery Act and requires schools to provide warnings within 30 minutes after campus or local law enforcement officials have determined there is an emergency or dangerous situation on campus.

Had Virginia Tech quickly warned students that there was a gunman on campus when first two murders were confirmed, many of the victims may have sought shelter or stayed put. Instead, people went about their normal day with no knowledge of the danger they were about to encounter.

No notifications were sent until 9:26 a.m., when the school emailed students that there was a shooting, and to watch for suspicious behavior. At 9:45 a.m., the second round of shootings occurred. But by that time, students had already gone to their classes.

Many believe if the students had been notified earlier, they might not have gone to class and some might not have been exposed to the shooter.

If the warnings required by the VTV Act were in place on April 16, 2007, lives might have been saved.